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21 July 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR SENIOR STAFF

SUBJECT: Inspection of Classified Documents at LBJ Library Related to Covert Actions Against Cuba

FROM: Loch Johnson

Among the many documents which I examined at the Johnson Library in Texas this past week is one that I find particularly alarming. I wish to draw it to your attention.

The document in question is from the JCS to the Secretary of Defense, dated 30 October 1964. The subject is a proposed covert action against Cuba, with the code name SQUARE DANCE.

On 21 March 1964, the JCS responded to a Presidential request for new ideas relative to Cuba by advising the White House that any new promising courses of action to undermine the Castro regime would be brought to the President's attention. Apparently their first bright new idea was SQUARE DANCE, outlined in the 30 October document (attached). The proposal envisioned the destruction of the Cuban economy by introducing serially from off-shore a sugar cane plant parasite called Bangle. The program would begin with a 30 per cent reduction of anticipated Cuban sugar production (see page 6) and within three-to-six years the ruination of the sugar industry would be achieved. "The economic and political disturbances caused by this attack could be exacerbated and exploited," continues the JCS memo, "by such measures as spreading hoof-and-mouth disease among draft animals, controlling rainfall by cloud seeding, mining cane fields, burning cane, and directing other acts of conventional sabotage against the cane milling and transportation systems" (6, emphasis added). In sum, SQUARE DANCE "would furnish another option to the United States in bringing about the collapse of the Castro regime" (7).

In Appendix A of the SQUARE DANCE proposal, the memo notes that the approval for implementation of the program "would introduce a new dimension into cold war methods and would require a major change in national policy." Indeed it would—or at least one hopes we have not used such methods before! The proposal is nothing less than a variant of germ warfare which would have had serious consequences for the Cuban civilian population.

At this point we do not know what happened to the SQUARE DANCE concept. It may never have been implemented at all, even partially. (The covering memo written by Bowman, an NSC staffer, to Bundy suggests that the White House was skeptical toward the idea.) To me, though,

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the mere writing of this kind of proposal is a reprehensible first step toward the worst kind of foreign policy mischief. I find it even more repugnant than contingency plans for assassination. These are not the kinds of recommendations which should filter up to the White House from the intelligence community. The agencies must have a better sense of what is acceptable policy, legally and morally. As in the Huston Plan, the White House was confronted here with a series of illegal and unethical options. [The result of SQUARE DANCE would have been parasitic death for the major plant and animal life in Cuba. The feeble efforts of the CIA to direct assassination attempts against Castro pale by comparison with this Army proposal for covert action.]

I believe SQUARE DANCE deserves our attention. If assassination is unacceptable, surely too is the widespread destruction of [plant and animal life through covert germ warfare.] Somehow (probably through hearings and restrictive legislation) the Congress must drive home the point that there are legal and moral limits to American foreign policy. These limits may not be easy to define, but we must try.

Note: On the third page of the second attachment (a "Memorandum for Discussion of Covert Program Against Cuba" written by Bundy) reference is made to "possible addition of contaminating elements to sensitive Cuban imports (not food)." The cover memo from Gordon Chase (NSC staffer) indicates that this proposal received Presidential backing.